

*Primary Source Readings in*  
Catholic Church History



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Robert Feduccia Jr.  
with Nick Wagner

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## Introduction

Looking through old pictures of ourselves is always fun. In those dated photos, we see what we looked like when we were born; we remember early birthdays and laugh about some of the presents we received; and perhaps we look at some pictures with embarrassment. Clothing, hairstyles, and old boyfriends or girlfriends have the potential to ruin the pictures in a family album. Hairstyles come and go. Clothing styles change quickly. But the pictures are an undeniable testament to what or who we thought was cool. They are more than just static images. They reveal a little about our thoughts, our feelings, and our attitudes.

Pictures are a frozen moment in time. Life is continuous, and because of that, we hardly notice the changes happening to us. A student looks at herself every day in the mirror and probably doesn't notice any change in her appearance. But if that student compares her eighth-grade picture to her ninth-grade picture, the changes are obvious, if not dramatic. This book, *Primary Source Readings in Catholic Church History*, is like the Church's family photo album, filled with snapshots—frozen moments in time.

In this book, you will find pictures of the Church's birth, the hard times she has suffered, and the infusion of new life in every age. The Church's album also includes pictures of family fights. West versus East, emperor versus pope, and reformers versus counter-reformers are fights that stand in portrait. Yet, when we place those frozen moments in time next to each other, a mosaic appears. In this composite picture you find heroic people who love the Lord and who want to be his servants. You also find that Jesus's words from Matthew 16:18 and from Matthew 28:20 are true: "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it," and "Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

These snapshots are not just about humans and humanity's attempt to steer the Church on the right course. They are also a story of God. Every letter, document, and report is also a picture of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In them, God reaches out to humans in

love and calls humanity into an intimate relationship. Although the Church changes from century to century, God does not. God is constant and continuously reaches out to humanity and touches human hearts. The great Catholic thinker Edward Schillebeeckx once wrote: “God’s saving activity ‘makes history’ by revealing itself, and it reveals itself by becoming history.” The snapshots in this book reveal the Church’s history. But they also tell the story of God’s constant love and desire to draw humanity into a deeper relationship with him.

## *Chapter 1*

# **Initiation into a Community: The Body of Christ as a Model of the Church**

## **“A Rite of Passage”**

### **Who Wrote It?**

Rev. Aidan Kavanagh, OSB, was born in 1929 in Mexia, Texas. He became a Benedictine monk of Saint Meinrad Archabbey, Saint Meinrad, Indiana, in 1952 and was ordained to the priesthood in 1957. Kavanagh taught at Saint Meinrad School of Theology and also at the University of Notre Dame, where he was the director of graduate studies in liturgy and theology. In 1974, he joined the faculty at Yale Divinity School as a professor of liturgics.

### **When Was It Written?**

“A Rite of Passage” was delivered as part of a lecture at the Theology Institute at Holy Cross Abbey in Canon City, Colorado, in 1977.

### **Why Was It Written?**

For many years, Rev. Aidan Kavanagh has championed a renewal in the way sacraments are celebrated. In particular, he has worked to enliven the rites of initiation, the way people come into the Church. He believes that enlivening these rites can happen by restoring the practices of the early Christian communities. He wants today’s Church to celebrate a person’s entrance into the Body of Christ in much the same way

the early Christians brought people into the community of faith. To try to influence such changes, he has written many scholarly books on the initiation practices of the early Christians. His academic writings are well respected and influential. But Kavanagh wanted to accomplish something that scholarly essays could not. He wanted a story to bring to life in clear imagery, the sounds, smells, and richness of the early Christian initiation.

## **Why Is It Still Important Today?**

In many places, the sacred Scriptures refer to the Church as the Body of Christ. To highlight this dimension, or model, of the Church, one emphasizes the Church as a community bound together by the Holy Spirit. This unity is expressed in the way the community speaks about or professes its faith, in the way it worships and celebrates, and in the way its members foster companionship with one another. “A Rite of Passage” demonstrates all these aspects and can illumine the Body of Christ as a model for the Church.

## **Primary Source: “A Rite of Passage”**

I have always rather liked the gruff robustness of the first rubric for baptism found in a late fourth-century church order which directs that the bishop enter the vestibule of the baptistery and say to the catechumens without commentary or apology only four words: “Take off your clothes.” There is no evidence that the assistants fainted or the catechumens asked what he meant. Catechesis and much prayer and fasting had led them to understand that the language of their passage this night in Christ from death to life would be the language of the bathhouse and the tomb—not that of the forum and the drawing room.

So they stripped and stood there, probably, faint from fasting, shivering from the cold of early Easter morning and with awe at what was about to transpire. Years of formation were about to be consummated; years of having their motives and lives scrutinized; years of hearing the word of God read and expounded at worship; years of being dismissed with prayer before the Faithful went on to celebrate the eucharist; years of having the doors to the assembly hall closed to them; years of seeing the tomb-like baptistery building only from without; years of hearing the old folks of the community tell hair-

raising tales of what being a Christian had cost their own grandparents when the emperors were still pagan; years of running into a reticent and reverent vagueness concerning what was actually done by the Faithful at the breaking of bread and in that closed baptistry. . . . Tonight all this was about to end as they stood here naked on a cold floor in the gloom of this eerie room.

Abruptly the bishop demands that they face westward, toward where the sun dies swallowed up in darkness, and denounce the King of shadows and death and things that go bump in the night. Each one of them comes forward to do this loudly under the hooded gaze of the bishop (who is tired from presiding all night at the vigil continuing next door in the church), as deacons shield the nudity of the male catechumens from the women, and deaconesses screen the women in the same manner. This is when each of them finally lets go of the world and of life as they have known it: the umbilical cord is cut, but they have not yet begun to breathe.

Then they must each turn eastwards toward where the sun surges up bathed in a light which just now can be seen stealing into the alabaster windows of the room. They must voice their acceptance of the King of light and life who has trampled down death by his own death. As each one finishes this he or she is fallen upon by a deacon or a deaconess who vigorously rubs olive oil into his or her body, as the bishop perhaps dozes off briefly, leaning on his cane. (He is like an old surgeon waiting for the operation to begin.)

When all the catechumens have been thoroughly oiled, they and the bishop are suddenly startled by the crash of the baptistry doors being thrown open. Brilliant golden light spills out into the shadowy vestibule, and following the bishop (who has now regained his composure) the catechumens and the assistant presbyters, deacons, deaconesses, and sponsors move into the most glorious room most of them

## *Deaconesses*

Deaconesses were women who had important roles in the early Church. Bishop, priest, and deacon are ministries in the Church to which men are ordained. Although history does not indicate that deaconesses were ordained, the role of deaconesses and their significance in the life of the Christian community is evident. They led women in prayer; they served the community's widows; and they assisted in the Baptism of women.

have ever seen. It is a high, arbor-like pavilion of green, gold, purple, and white mosaic from marble floor to domed ceiling sparkling like jewels in the light of innumerable oil lamps that fill the room with a heady warmth. The windows are beginning to blaze with the light of Easter dawn. The walls curl with vines and tendrils that thrust up from the floor, and at their tops apostles gaze down robed in snow-white togas, holding crowns. They stand around a golden chair draped with purple upon which rests only an open book. And above all these, in the highest point of the ballooning dome, a naked Jesus (very much in the flesh) stands up to his waist in the Jordan as an unkempt John pours water on him and God's disembodied hand points the Holy Spirit at Jesus' head in the form of a white bird.

Suddenly the catechumens realize that they have unconsciously formed themselves into a mirror-image of this lofty icon on the floor directly beneath it. They are standing around a pool let into the middle of the floor, into which gushes water pouring noisily from the mouth of a stone lion crouching atop a pillar at poolside. The bishop stands beside this, his presbyters on each side: a deacon has entered the pool, and the other assistants are trying to maintain a modicum of decorum among the catechumens who forget their nakedness as they crowd close to see. The room is warm, humid, and it glows. It is a golden paradise in a bathhouse in a mausoleum: an oasis, Eden restored: the navel of the world, where death and life meet, copulate, and become undistinguishable from each other. Jonah peers out from a niche, Noah from another, Moses from a third, and the paralytic carrying his stretcher from a fourth. The windows begin to sweat.

The bishop rumbles a massive prayer—something about the Spirit and the waters of life and death—and then pokes the water a few times with his cane. The catechumens recall Moses doing something like that to a rock from which water flowed, and they are mightily impressed. Then a young male catechumen of about ten, the son of pious parents, is led down into the pool by the deacon. The water is warm (it has been heated in a furnace), and the oil on his body spreads out on the surface in iridescent swirls. The deacon positions the child near the cascade from the lion's mouth. The bishop leans over on his cane, and in a voice that sounds like something out of the Apocalypse, says: "Euphemius! Do you believe in God the Father, who created all of heaven and earth?" After a nudge from the deacon beside him, the boy

murmurs that he does. And just in time, for the deacon, who has been doing this for fifty years and is the boy's grandfather, wraps him in his arms, lifts him backwards into the rushing water and forces him under the surface. The old deacon smiles through his beard at the wide brown eyes that look up at him in shock and fear from beneath the water (the boy has purposely not been told what to expect). Then he raises him up coughing and sputtering. The bishop waits until he can speak again, and leaning over a second time, tapping the boy on the shoulder with his cane, says: "Euphemius! Do you believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, who was conceived of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, and was crucified, died, and was buried? Who rose on the third day and ascended into heaven, from whence he will come again to judge the living and the dead?" This time he replies like a shot, "I do," and then holds his nose. . . . "Euphemius! Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the master and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who is to be honored and glorified equally with the Father and the Son, who spoke by the Prophets? And in one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church which is the communion of God's holy ones? And in the life that is coming?" "I do."

When he comes up the third time, his vast grandfather gathers him in his arms and carries him up the steps leading out of the pool. There another deacon roughly dries Euphemius with a warm towel, and a senior presbyter, who is almost ninety and is regarded by all as a "confessor" because he was imprisoned for the faith as a young man, tremulously pours perfumed oil from a glass pitcher over the boy's damp head until it soaks his hair and runs down over his upper body. The fragrance of this enormously expensive oil fills the room as the old man mutters: "God's servant, Euphemius, is anointed in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Euphemius is then wrapped in a new linen tunic; the fragrant chrism seeps into it, and he is given a burning terracotta oil lamp and told to go stand by the door and keep quiet. Meanwhile, the other baptisms have continued.

When all have been done in this same manner (an old deaconess, a widow, replaced Euphemius's grandfather when it came the women's time), the clergy strike up the Easter hymn, "Christ is risen from the dead, he has crushed death by his death and bestowed life on those who lay in the tomb." To this constantly repeated melody interspersed with the Psalm verse, "Let God arise and smite his enemies," the whole

baptismal party—tired, damp, thrilled, and oily—walk out into the blaze of Easter morning and go next door to the church led by the bishop. There he bangs on the closed doors with his cane: they are flung open, the endless vigil is halted, and the baptismal party enters as all take up the hymn, “Christ is risen . . . ,” which is all but drowned out by the ovations that greet Christ truly risen in his newly-born ones. As they enter, the fragrance of chrism fills the church: it is the Easter-smell, God’s grace olfactorally incarnate. The pious struggle to get near the newly baptized to touch their chrismed hair and rub its fragrance on their own faces. All is chaos until the baptismal party manages to reach the towering ambo that stands in the middle of the pewless hall. The bishop ascends its lower front steps, turns to face the white-clad neophytes grouped at the bottom with their burning lamps and the boisterous faithful now held back by a phalanx of well-built acolytes and doorkeepers. Euphemius’s mother has fainted and been carried outside for some air.

The bishop opens his arms to the neophytes and once again all burst into “Christ is risen,” *Christos aneste*. . . . He then affirms and seals their baptism after prayer, for all the Faithful to see, with an authoritative gesture of paternity—laying his hand on each head, signing each oily forehead once again in the form of a cross, while booming out: “The servant of God is sealed with the Holy Spirit.” To which all reply in a thunderous “Amen,” and for the first time the former catechumens receive and give the kiss of peace. Everyone is in tears.

While this continues, bread and wine are laid out on the holy table; the bishop then prays at great length over them after things quiet down, and the neophytes lead all to communion with Euphemius out in front. While his grandfather holds his lamp, Euphemius dines on the precious Body whose true and undoubted member he has become; drinks the precious Blood of him in whom he himself has now died; and just this once drinks from two other special cups—one containing baptismal water, the other containing milk and honey mixed as a gustatory icon of the promised land into which he and his colleagues have finally entered out of the desert through Jordan’s waters. Then his mother (now recovered and somewhat pale, still insisting she had only stumbled) took him home and put him, fragrantly, to bed.

Euphemius had come a long way. He had passed from death into a life he lives still.

## **The Ship of Salvation: The Church as an Institution**

### **“The Dream of Saint John Bosco”**

#### **Who Wrote It?**

Saint John Bosco lived in the northern Italian city of Turin during the 1840s. Grieved by the poverty and the crime among urban young people, he dedicated his ministry to the young people. He sheltered countless numbers of the city’s homeless young people and instructed them in the Catholic faith. Because of his tireless and selfless dedication to the young people of Turin, Bosco has been named the patron saint of those who work with young people.

#### **When Was It Written?**

When Saint John Bosco had his dream is not known. But on May 30, 1862, he told the boys he was sheltering that he had a good story for them. This chapter contains the allegory he told them.

#### **Why Was It Written?**

Workers in the new factories being built endured long work hours for very little money. Because of those working conditions, the young people of the city were left poor and unsupervised. Those desperate young people turned to robbery and other crimes to make a way for their survival. The situation was in dire need of the good news of Jesus

Christ. Scholars agree that Saint John Bosco had simple reasons for telling the dream. Those reasons were that he wanted the boys to stay close to the Church, to pray for the Holy Father, and to hold on to a love for Mary and the Blessed Sacrament. During Bosco's time, a ship at sea was a common analogy for the Church. The secular world was seen as waves and storms that could swallow and drown the earth's peoples. In order to be saved from such danger, a person had to band together with others on a sturdy ship with a noble and trustworthy captain.

### **Why Is It Still Important Today?**

Very shortly after Saint John Bosco told the dream to the boys, they began to discuss what it could mean. Some felt it was simply an allegory. Others believed that it was a prophecy or a vision of the future. The dream remains important today for many reasons. Certainly, Bosco's reason for telling the dream to that group of boys remains. But for the purposes of this book, "The Dream of Saint John Bosco" provides a rich image for a model of the Church as an institution. Among the many ways of understanding what the Church and its purpose are, seeing the Church as an institution provides Catholics with clarity and certainty. Such surety can provide comfort during times such as these when many discomfiting events are taking place.

### **Primary Source: "The Dream of Saint John Bosco"**

A few nights ago I had a dream. True, dreams are nothing but dreams, but still I'll tell it to you for your spiritual benefit, just as I would tell you even my sins—only I'm afraid I'd send you scurrying away before the roof fell in. Try to picture yourselves with me on the seashore, or, better still, on an outlying cliff with no other land in sight. The vast expanse of water is covered with a formidable array of ships in battle formation, prows fitted with sharp, spearlike beaks capable of breaking through any defense. All are heavily armed with cannons, incendiary bombs, and firearms of all sorts—even books—and are heading toward one stately ship, mightier than them all. As they close in, they try to ram it, set it afire, and cripple it as much as possible.

This stately vessel is shielded by a flotilla escort. Winds and waves are with the enemy. In the midst of this endless sea, two solid columns,

a short distance apart, soar high into the sky: one is surmounted by a statue of the Immaculate Virgin at whose feet a large inscription reads: *Help of Christians*; the other, far loftier and sturdier, supports a Host of proportionate size and bears beneath it the inscription *Salvation of believers*.

The flagship commander—the Roman Pontiff—seeing the enemy’s fury and his auxiliary ships’ very grave predicament, summons his captains to a conference. However, as they discuss their strategy, a furious storm breaks out and they must return to their ships.

When the storm abates, the Pope again summons his captains as the flagship keeps on its course. But the storm rages again. Standing at the helm, the Pope strains every muscle to steer his ship between the two columns from whose summits hang many anchors and strong hooks linked to chains.

The entire enemy fleet closes in to intercept and sink the flagship at all costs. They bombard it with everything they have: books and pamphlets, incendiary bombs, firearms, cannons. The battle rages ever more furious. Beaked prows ram the flagship again and again, but to no avail, as, unscathed and undaunted, it keeps on its course. At times a formidable ram splinters a gaping hole into its hull, but, immediately, a breeze from the two columns instantly seals the gash.

Meanwhile, enemy cannons blow up, firearms and beaks fall to pieces, ships crack up and sink to the bottom. In blind fury the enemy takes to hand-to-hand combat, cursing and blaspheming. Suddenly the Pope falls, seriously wounded. He is instantly helped up but, struck down a second time, dies. A shout of victory rises from the enemy and wild rejoicing sweeps their ships. But no sooner is the Pope dead than another takes his place. The captains of the auxiliary ships elected him so quickly that the news of the Pope’s death coincides with that of his successor’s election. The enemy’s self-assurance wanes.

Breaking through all resistance, the new Pope steers his ship safely between the two columns and moors it to the two columns; first, to the one surmounted by the Host, and then to the other, topped by the statue of the Virgin. At this point, something unexpected happens. The enemy ships panic and disperse, colliding with and scuttling each other.

Some auxiliary ships which had gallantly fought alongside their flagship are the first to tie up at the two columns. Many others, which

had fearfully kept far away from the fight, stand still, cautiously waiting until the wrecked enemy ships vanish under the waves. Then, they too head for the two columns, tie up at the swinging hooks, and ride safe and tranquil beside their flagship. A great calm now covers the sea.

“And so,” Don Bosco at this point asked Father Rua, “what do you make of this?”

“I think,” he answered, “that the flagship symbolizes the Church commanded by the Pope; the ships represent mankind; the sea is an image of the world. The flagship’s defenders are the laity loyal to the Church; the attackers are her enemies who strive with every weapon to destroy her. The two columns, I’d say, symbolize devotion to Mary and the Blessed Sacrament.”

Father Rua did not mention the Pope who fell and died. Don Bosco, too, kept silent on this point, simply adding: “Very well, Father, except for one thing: the enemy ships symbolize persecutions. Very grave trials await the Church. What we suffered so far is almost nothing compared to what is going to happen. The enemies of the Church are symbolized by the ships which strive their utmost to sink the flagship. Only two things can save us in such a grave hour: devotion to Mary and frequent Communion. Let’s do our very best to use these two means and have others use them everywhere. Good night!”

## Acknowledgments

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The quotation in the “Hospitality” sidebar on page 77 and the words from the prologue to *The Rule of St. Benedict* on pages 78–80 are from *The Rule of St. Benedict*, translated by Anthony Meisel and M. L.

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The excerpt from the “Declaration of Vision: Toward the Next 500 Years” statement to the 1993 Parliament of the World’s Religions on page 128 is from *Turtle Quarterly*, Fall-Winter 1994, page 8, at [www.ili.nativeweb.org/dovision.html](http://www.ili.nativeweb.org/dovision.html), accessed December 9, 2004.

The excerpts from *Inter Caetera* on pages 128–130 are from The Catholic Community Forum at [www.catholic-forum.com/saints/pope0214a.htm](http://www.catholic-forum.com/saints/pope0214a.htm), accessed December 8, 2004.

The quotation from “Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions” on page 131 is from [www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/secretariat\\_state/2004/documents/rc\\_seg-st\\_20040914\\_osce-brussels\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat_state/2004/documents/rc_seg-st_20040914_osce-brussels_en.html), accessed December 7, 2004.

The excerpt from *Sublimus Dei* on pages 131–132 is from Papal Encyclicals Online at [www.papalencyclicals.net/Paul03/p3subli.htm](http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Paul03/p3subli.htm), accessed December 8, 2004.

The quotation on page 134 is from the “Message of Pope John Paul II to the Participants in the International Conference Commemorating the Fourth Centenary of the Arrival in Beijing of Father Matteo Ricci” at [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/speeches/2001/october/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_20011024\\_matteo-ricci\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/2001/october/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20011024_matteo-ricci_en.html), accessed December 7, 2004.

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The quotation from Pope John Paul II on page 175 is from the encyclical *Dives in misericordia*, paragraph 12, at [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_30111980\\_dives-in-misericordia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30111980_dives-in-misericordia_en.html), accessed December 6, 2004.

The excerpts from *Gaudium et Spes* on pages 176–178 are from [www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_cons\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html), accessed September 24, 2004.

The quotation on page 180 and the excerpts from *Lumen Gentium* on pages 180–184 are from [www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html), accessed December 9, 2004.

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